

Evidence

Case Study of Rose Blossom ABC Club

Special Note

This skill building activity builds upon the Theory of Change module's definitions of theory of change and the three necessary elements (Community Problem/Need, Outcome, and Intervention) with a special emphasis on the evidence concepts provided in this module. It can be used to apply the concepts and principles to real world situations.

Introduction

This exercise allows learners to critique a sample grant application narrative for an afterschool program to assess how well the applicant identified the theory of change and each of the necessary elements with a focus on the evidence provided for the choice of intervention and the data documenting the need.

Key Points and Definitions

A **theory of change** defines a cause-and-effect relationship between a specific intervention, or service activity, and an intended outcome.

Community problem is the specific need in the community you have chosen to address through your program/project.

Data documenting the need are statistics document the extent and severity of the community problem or need your program/project will address. The best data come from reputable primary sources, (such as government agencies, institutes, foundations, and universities that have conducted their own research), are as current (up to date) as possible, and are as locally relevant, as possible. News reports are NOT primary sources. Data from multiple (reputable) sources increases reliability.

An **Intervention** is a set of activities that you have chosen to address the need based on evidence that a similar approach has worked in the past or elsewhere.

Evidence is information from performance measurement results or evaluation/research findings that inform your understanding of why the intervention you have selected will result in the change identified as the outcome. Evidence should be:

- Relevant: Cites comparable intervention with similar beneficiaries and results
- Compelling: Persuasive, shows clear likelihood of success
- Up-to-date: Recently published or most recent that is available

Outcome is the change in attitude, knowledge, behavior, or condition that the intervention generates.

Sticking Points and Common Issues

The following are a few of the common issues that learners may encounter as they work with theories of change and evidence.

Community Problem/Need Issues:

- Explains the intervention activities instead of presenting data demonstrating the specific problem/issue in the community the intervention will address.
- The community need and intended outcome are not closely related.

Data Documenting the Need Issues:

- Uses state or national data instead of local data describing the need in the specific communities where the service will occur.
- Turns into a data dump with too many indirect or unrelated statistics provided.
- Doesn't use data from reputable sources that is current.
- Doesn't show the causes or consequences of the identified problem.
- Doesn't identify sources of the data

Intervention Issues:

- Description of the design and dosage (frequency, intensity, and duration) is incomplete or unclear.

Evidence Issues:

- Is not relevant, compelling, or current
- Doesn't come from data on program similar to the one proposed (based on design and dosage)
- Doesn't identify sources of the evidence
- Doesn't identify type of evidence (performance measurements, evaluation findings, or research results)
- Doesn't make a strong case for the choice of intervention

Outcome Issues:

- Isn't likely to occur based on the specific intervention.
- Doesn't directly relate to the community need.

Exercise

The following is a case study using Rose Blossom ABC Club's Rational and Approach narrative from an AmeriCorps grant application describing the program's theory of change.

Learners read the case study and then answer ten questions on how well Rose Blossom ABC Club presented:

- the Theory of Change
 - Community problem/need
 - the data documenting the problem
 - Intervention design and dosage
 - the evidence supporting the choice of the proposed intervention
 - Intended outcome

Case Study Rose Blossom ABC Club

Instructions:

The following case study presents Rose Blossom ABC Club's Rational and Approach narrative from an AmeriCorps grant application describing the program's theory of change. Read the narrative and then answer the ten attached questions.

RATIONALE AND APPROACH (ABRIDGED)

According to a report from Education Week (March 2008), every 29 seconds a young person drops out of high school in America. Nearly one-third (31 percent) of all public high school students fail to graduate with their class. In addition, low-income children, on average, tend to do worse academically than their more privileged contemporaries. Not only do high school dropouts earn about \$9,200 less per year and about \$1 million less over a lifetime than high school graduates, but dropouts are more than three times more likely than college graduates to be unemployed, twice as likely as high school graduates to slip into poverty and 3.5 times more likely than graduates to be incarcerated. Clearly the statistics compel us to act on behalf of our young people. Intervention in the lives of these young people is sometimes necessary to help them achieve academic success. Activities such as individualized remediation and help with homework can make the difference between success and failure.

The needs and problems to be addressed by our statewide service program are supported by KIDS COUNT 2008, a publication of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Rose Blossom Department of Education in which it was reported that in Rose Blossom: (1) 216,000 youth live in households where the head of household is a high school dropout; (2) 66% of 4th grade students scored below proficient reading level; and (3) 58% of 4th grade students scored below proficient math level.

After school programs do have academic impact, as reported in an October 2007 report from University of California-Irvine, University of Wisconsin-Madison and Policy Study Associates. The outcomes in the report include that "for disadvantaged elementary and middle school students, regular participation in high quality afterschool programs is linked to significant gains in standardized test scores and work habits." Gains included: (1) Significant increases in standardized math scores and (2) Stronger work and study habits, as reported by teachers.

Between 2006 & 2010, National ABC completed pre-tests, utilizing 3 sub-tests of the Woodcock Johnson Tests of Achievement (a research based assessment tool), on 14,102 children in reading and math. Results indicated (1) 63% of children scored below grade level, 4% scored at grade level and 33% scored

above grade level in reading and (2) 66% of children scored below grade level, 3% scored at grade level and 31% scored above grade level in math.

When we post-tested the Rose Blossom ABC Club children after 30 high-quality homework sessions, results included a 68% increase in reading and a 67% increase in math. Rose Blossom ABC BGC are poised and ready to assist in narrowing the achievement gap through educational support and enhancement that can be offered to Indiana youth through our Corps project.

Research studies confirm that homework completion does make a difference in helping children and teens become more confident, happy and successful in school.

A recent study of afterschool homework assistance programs across the country revealed the following statistics about participating students and parents: (1) 85% said that, as a result of homework assistance programs, their children enjoyed school more and improved their attendance and (2) Students participating in after-school programs were less likely to start drinking, and were more likely to handle their anger in socially appropriate ways.

Based on these findings, Corps members will be engaged in assisting Rose Blossom ABC Club youth in completing their homework and in developing their education skills and knowledge through the AIM HIGH program. AIM HIGH is a comprehensive homework help and individualized remediation program for ABC Club youth aged 6 to 18 years, AIM HIGH: Making Minutes Count provides youth with the support, resources and guidance necessary to complete their homework -- and start the school day with a sense of confidence and ability. As youth complete homework assignments and bonus activities, they accumulate AIM Points, which may be used to obtain AIM Rewards -- prizes, activities and incentives. In addition, AIM HIGH offers academic remediation help for youth who need additional work in special areas. AIM HIGH offers a structured time and place for Club staff and volunteers to help youth with an important aspect of the educational process -- homework. Youth emerge from the program better prepared for classes and proud of their hard work and accomplishments. The philosophy underlying the AIM HIGH program is that the benefits of homework are threefold -- academic, behavioral and social. By working on homework after school, youth reinforce skills and concepts learned that day. Young people who consistently complete their homework develop a deeper understanding of the work, and are ready to move on to more challenging concepts. In addition, homework completion leads to long-term improvements in youth grades and test scores.

Rose Blossom Case Study Questions

Please answer the following questions:

THEORY OF CHANGE

1. What is the applicant's theory of change? What is the identified need, the intervention and the outcome? Develop a brief statement.

COMMUNITY PROBLEM/NEED

2. Clear community problem/need. What negative condition (problem) exists in the community? What rationale is given for why this problem exists?

3a. Data supporting community need/problem. What data are provided to document the extent and severity of this problem? What data are provided to support the rationale for why this problem exists?

3b. How well do these data meet the criteria we discussed (reputable, current, local)?

3c. What data are missing?

INTENDED OUTCOME

4. What is the intended outcome they will measure?

INTERVENTION

5. Scope of Intervention. Describe the design and dosage of the applicant's proposed intervention.

6a. Evidence. What evidence does the applicant provide to demonstrate that this intervention will solve the problem?

6b. How well does the evidence presented in Question 6a meet the criteria we discussed (relevant, compelling, up-to-date, reliable source, strength of the evidence)?

6c. What evidence is missing?